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Christian union opens trend-setting training centre

Jessie Schut

EDMONTON —A skirl of bagpipe music serenaded ribbon cutters at the opening ceremonies of the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) Alberta Training Centre in Edmonton on Saturday, Dec. 14. Later, workers, employers, union representatives and well-wishers mingled convivially as they toured the renovated building which once housed a restaurant and office space. They had witnessed a historic moment which may set a trend for future labor-employer relationships.

The training centre is an innovative joint venture between CLAC and the 30 or more companies whose employees it represents in Alberta. Its goal is to provide training and retraining for CLAC members as they deal with the reality of a workplace

constantly changing under the influence of technology.

Technological changes

The establishment of the training centre has grown out of CLAC's concern for workers who are being displaced, not because they're unskilled but because their jobs are changing too rapidly.

"If you look at the redundancy of workers, what is the key factor?" asks Co Vanderlaan, CLAC Alberta's director. "That's technological changes, big time. It's the biggest factor."

He points to some of the realities workers are facing now: computer-savvy college graduates of 21 earning \$100,000 a year while their dads are sitting at home unemployed; furnace repair people who were trained years ago being asked to install

the latest electronically controlled heating system; and trained secretaries who are no longer needed in many offices.

"There's a whole generation from 25 on that is computer illiterate and scared," says Vanderlaan. "There's a whole raft of jobs that have disappeared, or their description has changed. Architects, graphic artists, draftsmen, typesetting — these jobs are totally different than they were even 10 years ago, and ironically, 10 years from now, or sooner, they'll be different again."

Research focusses the issue

Vanderlaan researched the issue of technology's impact on workers and their resulting primary needs during a three-

See TRAINING page 2...



Onlookers at the ribbon-cutting ceremony inside the CLAC training centre.

Dutch Bible smuggler to receive award in Vancouver

Bert Witvoet with files from Compass Direct)

LONDON — "God's Smuggler" is going to get a little bit of his reward this side of heaven. Brother Andrew, the Dutch evangelist who used to singlehandedly sneak Bibles across the Iron Curtain, has been awarded the World Evangelical Fellowship's Religious Liberty Award.

Commenting on the selection of Brother Andrew for this year's award, Brian O'Connell, former director of WEF's Religious Liberty Commission said, "In our opinion, no one has done more in raising the awareness of the persecuted church than Brother Andrew. In addition, he has done it with a willingness to work and co-operate with a number of other groups."

Brother Andrew, who was born in Alkmaar, the Nether-



Brother Andrew

lands, and whose real name is still withheld for security reasons, made his first trip to Eastern Europe in 1955. This followed a stint as soldier in Indonesia, where he was wounded, an event that led him to seriously read the Bible.

It was during Andrew's 1955 visit to a youth congress in Poland that his vision for serving the suffering church took shape. His activities became widely known through his book *God's Smuggler*, which has sold more than 10 million copies in a score of languages.

Brother Andrew's early focus was on such communist countries as China, Cuba and the former Soviet Union. But in 1990 his organization, known as Open Doors, began a campaign to bring the gospel to the Muslim world as well.

According to Brother Andrew there is a need to accelerate the ministry in these days, because "the night is coming that no one will be able to work." One key phrase that he uses is that "if people are reachable, they are winnable."

See BROTHER page 2...

In this Issue

Microcosmos opens an astonishing insect world.
Film review p. 7
Four CRC preachers tell how they choose
sermon texts p. 8

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News

Training centre a joint venture of labor and employers

... continued from page 1

month sabbatical he took in the summer of 1995. A large conference on training trends he attended during that time put the issue into focus for him.

He brought the results of his research to the executive of the

employers," says Vanderlaan. "We told them, 'Your employees help you make a profit, now you ought to be pouring those profits back into the workplace, to make sure your employees are current.' But we also knew it was harder for small companies to retrain their employees than for larger ones, so working together was important."

The dialogue resulted in CLAC's Alberta office opening the first and only training centre of its kind that is a joint enterprise of labor and employers. Eventually, training centres will also be established in Ontario and B.C. Bob Barker has been hired as the first training co-ordinator, responsible for scheduling courses and finding the resources necessary to conduct the courses.

State-of-the-art facility

The attractive and functional centre houses an assortment of large and small rooms furnished with tables, chairs and whiteboards, with access to a wide range of audiovisual equipment. A lab has been divided

into individual work stations supplied with 20 state-of-the-art computers, while a fully equipped restaurant kitchen is also on the premises. One of the large meeting spaces will be set up with supermarket cashier lanes.

The employers and CLAC have contractually committed to provide training opportunities for workers to learn new skills, upgrade current skills, and keep current on changing trends in the workplace. At the shop level, each employer, in consultation with CLAC workers, has set up a four-member committee to design specific programs for that particular work community.

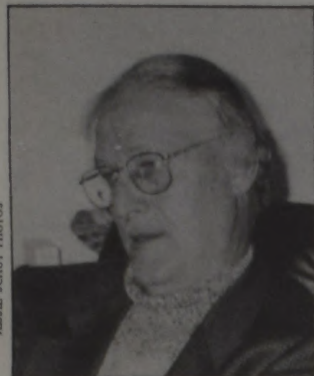
Possible training may include upgrading programs for electricians, plumbers, pipefitters, welders, sprinkler fitters and other construction trades. As well, first aid courses, computer skills, and hands-on training for cashiers, bakery workers, meat cutters and other food processing jobs can be taught at the centre.

One such course which is being offered for the first time

anywhere in Alberta is computer-generated study for construction safety certification. By 1998, says Vanderlaan, any worker going into a major work site will need to have proof that he or she has passed the safety certification standards. Workers

out of their own homes, he envisions the general local offering support and informational workshops in self-employment.

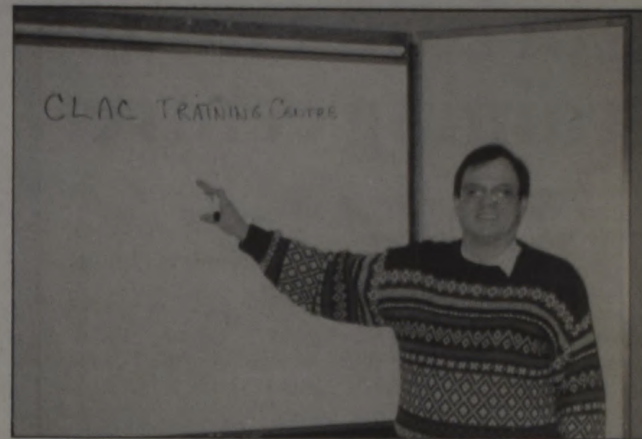
"The Christian community has supported this organization because they believe that our voice needs to be heard in



Co Vanderlaan

CLAC. They agreed that the organization needed to be at the forefront of training people — the only course of action that would ensure that workers would not be displaced.

"We also began pushing the



Bob Barker, training co-ordinator at the new training centre.

Brother Andrew dedicated to reaching restricted countries

... continued from page 1

Today, Open Doors has a staff of over 200 full-time workers in 20 different countries, dedicated to the work of delivering Bibles into countries where they are banned or restricted. Open Doors also supports and en-

courages believers who are suffering for their faith, and trains church leaders who live in countries opposed to the gospel.

In his initial response to the upcoming award, Brother Andrew stated, "I feel very honored that my name has even

come up for recognition, since I realize the work of Open Doors is not the work of one man, but of a dedicated group of people who work in the field, a large group who contribute and an even larger group who pray."

Established in 1992, the Religious Liberty Award is conferred on a person who has made an outstanding contribution to the cause of religious liberty. Previous recipients have been Romulo Saune of Peru in 1992 and, posthumously, Haik Hovsepian-Mehr of Iran in 1994. Romulo Saune, a Quechua pastor, was killed in September 1992 by Shining Path guerrillas after a ministry visit to Christian believers near the remote village of Chakiquampa, Peru. Haik Hovsepian-Mehr, chair of the Council of Protestant Churches in Iran until his death, was murdered in January 1994 in Tehran. Haik was an outspoken critic of the repression faced by Christians in Iran.

The award to Brother Andrew will be bestowed at the May 1997 WEF General Assembly to be held just outside Vancouver, B.C.

can come into the training centre's computer lab and take the course when convenient — when they're laid off or recovering from injury, for instance — thus saving themselves and future employers time and money.

Trust fund basis

Financing of the centre has come from the employers, who pay a certain number of cents per hour for every hour an employee works. That amount is paid into a trust fund administered by a board of directors. The centre operates under the supervision of the Training Trust Fund board of directors, made up of two CLAC representatives, two CLAC member workers and two employers. They take over all the responsibilities of running the training centre.

The Training Centre is available, as well, to different employee organizations associated with CLAC members. For example, the employee organization of Merit Contractors has entered a reciprocal agreement with CLAC to develop and share training opportunities.

Vanderlaan is also enthusiastic about offering the building to the larger Christian community. He foresees the time when courses in computer literacy would be scheduled for interested people — he may even enrol in one of those himself, since he admits he has a lot to learn. Or, pointing to the trend in contract employees working

society, we are an alternative," he says. "There are things we can give back to the Christian community in that way, it's a way that a Christian organization can help them in their day-to-day work."

While most of the building is occupied by the training centre, CLAC has moved its offices into half of the ground floor in the 21,500 square-foot, three-storey structure.

Appreciates foresight

Just how revolutionary the concept of a joint union-management training centre is became evident at the opening. Employers, laborers and CLAC representatives mingled and chatted together, united in their enthusiasm for the building and its possible uses, dreaming and seeing visions together.

"This is wonderful," said Gerry Olmstead, manager of Save-On Foods Alberta, which has already used the building for management training sessions. "I really appreciate this union. They iron out problems before they get too big. The employees are the losers when relationships become confrontational."

"It's so nice to be compatible. The employer can't exist without the workers, and vice versa. We need each other."

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News/Politics

World Bank will invite religious leaders to values summit

WASHINGTON, D.C. (REC) — The World Bank will invite leaders of the world's main religious bodies to Washington next year to discuss spiritual and cultural issues with bank officials. The meeting is an attempt by the bank to talk with its critics, including churches, Christian agencies and other non-governmental organizations.

Allied powers set up the World Bank, along with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in the 1940s to prevent major economic and currency collapses. Today the bank lends about \$20 billion annually for development projects.

The World Bank has denied some of the criticism. Andrew Steer, director of the bank's environment department, said the bank could have done better in some areas, but said criticism was often ill-informed. "Quite frankly, I think most of the religious groups should educate themselves. The issues are too serious to allow sloppiness and laziness, which is the case in some of the religious papers I read," he said.

Protesting 'structural adjustments'

Most of the recent protests, including those from Reformed Ecumenical Council members, have to do with the Structural Adjustment Programs. Brian Wilson, a World Bank vice-president, said the structural adjustments were demanded to ensure that heavy, centralized bureaucracies did not consume all the funds. Government leaders appointed their friends to bureaucratic posts, and taxed rural farm income heavily.

Wilson stressed that the bank's loans to the poorest countries were at a very low interest rate, from .5 per cent to one per cent and repayable over 40 years.

Steer pointed out that many bank staff members are Christians, but that did not automatically mean the bank policies were Christian. Recently, there has been a growing realization that purely technical solutions did not work. The World Bank was ready to explore new possibilities for working with the poor.

At a joint meeting of the IMF and the World Bank in September, they endorsed the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. The initiative recommended that a package of \$7.7 billion be set up for debt relief. This includes \$2 billion from the World Bank and \$1.2 billion from the IMF. The breakthrough came after a two-year negotiation over a World Bank initiative to relieve debt.

More pressure needed

The Paris Club, a group of creditor nations who hold about 75 per cent of the world's debt, agreed to raise the limit on debt relief from 67 per cent to 80 per cent of the debt. World Bank officials said that was not high enough. The Bank and the IMF wanted 90 per cent reductions of debt, since the poorest countries could not sustain even that amount of debt. However, the Bank and IMF hope funds could be added on a case-by-case basis. The agreement paves the way for the first of about 20 highly indebted countries to receive assistance.

Some lobbying by the pressure groups may have had an effect on the initiative to address international debt. A World Bank official acknowledged that pressure from church groups and NGOs had increased recently, but it was difficult to assess how much influence they had. He noted that the ones that did have an influence were the ones who had a mastery of the details.

Barbara Kohnen, a policy advisor for the U.S. National Roman Catholic Bishops Conference, said that it was important to have both general ideological pressures and detailed pragmatic alternatives. High-profile groups draw some attention, and others, such as Oxfam, have done much detailed work. She believes NGOs have clearly influenced the World Bank's stands.

Not enough help

Another debt-monitoring group, Jubilee 2000, was skeptical of the achievement. Ann Pettifor noted that to qualify a country has to be "highly impoverished, highly indebted and performing well." Debtor countries have six years to



Principalities & Powers



David T. Koyzis

'Time, like an ever-rolling stream...'

At the New Year we become freshly aware of the passing of time, in both personal and global senses. We look in the mirror and real-

ize we are not as young as we used to be. Friends and family grow up and grow old around us. The cycles of death and birth simultaneously take their toll and renew us. And once we reach a certain age, we become aware that the world in which we now live is very different from the one into which we were born.

For the last 70 years or so we North Americans have tended to measure historical epochs in decades. Since at least the 1920s it seems that every 10 years has been characterized by its own specific *Zeitgeist*, governing such things as sexual attitudes, political opinions and economic policies. Much as an archaeologist might identify a recently discovered artifact as Ming Dynasty Chinese, we are wont to identify a 1940s Hudson in a classic auto show, a 1950s hairdo from an old magazine, or a 1970s pair of bell-bottoms in the back of our closet.

Unprecedented change

All of which is to say that ours has been an era of unprecedented change. It is no longer possible to assume that, say, North American culture is characterized by a stable moral consensus tying successive generations together over a long period of time. No civilization is static, of course, but it seems safe to observe that in our time the pace of such change has accelerated in a variety of areas.

Thirty years ago people spoke of a "generation gap" between the inter-war generation and the post-war baby boomers — between a generation that lived through the Depression and global conflict, and their children who were born into unparalleled privilege and prosperity. This earlier generation gap played itself out in the recent American presidential election, as pre-boomer Bob Dole failed in his attempt to recover political leadership for his generation from baby-boomer Bill Clinton.

Now a new gap has opened up between the boomers and "Generation X," composed of people in their teens and 20s. "Exers" (as they might be called) are aware that they are growing up in an era of diminished expectations, in which underemployment, "downsizing" and fiscal austerity are facts of life. The boundless optimism of the boomers has given way to the cynicism of the exers.

One Kingdom will not fail

In three years — or four, depending on one's method of calculation — the 20th century, and the current millennium, will come to a close. It is somewhat sobering to realize that by then I will have survived one of the most turbulent centuries in human history, but that I will certainly not survive the following one, unless Christ should return first.

It is also disquieting to consider the political changes that are likely to come in the new century. Over the past 97 years we have seen an end to the ancient Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, the rise and fall of at least two totalitarian states, two global wars, and mass murders numbering in the scores of millions. We have also seen the spiritual centre of Christianity shift, first from Europe to North America, and then from North America to the so-called Third World.

Will Canada and the United States survive the 21st century? Will there still be millions of Christians in North America in 2099? Of course we don't know the answers to these questions. But whatever they are, we can rely on God's promise that, as earthly empires rise and fall, his Kingdom will not pass away.

David Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ont., and still enjoys listening to records on his record player.

establish a good track record before the IMF will disburse funds. Moreover, Pettifor wrote, the meeting in Washington agreed on how to finance it. They still have to raise most of the money promised for debt relief.



van der Woerd
LAW OFFICE

David A. van der Woerd B.A., LL.B.

20 Jackson Street West, Suite 512, Hamilton, Ontario L8P 1L2
Tel. (905) 577-6205 Fax (905) 577-9498

Editorial

If only God had given us more answers

It seems that a group of Newfoundland archeologists have stumbled upon a hitherto unknown letter of the Apostle Bartholomew to the church at Bonavista. What's interesting about this letter is that it addresses a number of issues that have puzzled the churches for many years. The letter has quickly been divided into 18 chapters by New Testament scholars so that reference to passages has been facilitated.

We read in Bartholomew 1:7 the following: "Now concerning the matter of abortion, which I understand is a contentious issue in Bonavista, I want you to know that the first trimester is not considered crucial in terms of the protection of God's image. The onset of image-bearing takes place somewhere between the 12th and the 13th week of pregnancy. Make sure therefore that no abortions take place in your midst after the 12th

week following conception."

In Bartholomew 3:18, the Apostle takes up the matter of women in leadership position. "Know you not that women have been kept down too long and that such is a perpetuation of the curse placed on Adam and Eve? Are we under obligation to continue this curse? By no means, lest we fall into the trap of aiding and abetting Satan in his efforts to prolong the curse. To counteract this trend I demand that the church alternate between having men preach one Sunday and women, the other."

One needs to discern carefully

In chapter 12 starting with verse 11, Bartholomew touches on the issue of homosexuality. He writes: "I know that brother Paul has written some harsh things about homosexuality in his letter to the Romans, but I want you to know that Paul was mainly interested in people who started out being heterosexual, but they exchanged that orientation for a homosexual one. Hence, Paul's words do not apply to those who have always felt different and needed to make no adjustment in their orientation. To them I say, abstain if you can and go cod fishing. But if you should find that too difficult, keep to one partner, and make the best of it."

In chapter 14 Bartholomew tackles the issue of gambling. He sees this as a difficult issue that needs much discernment. He argues in favor of bingo and church bazaars that involve games of chance, but he cautions against casinos and video lottery machines because the atmosphere is too far removed from those of churches and Christian schools. In verse 4 he sets a very

helpful guideline: "If the amount you wager exceeds that of one 20th of your total income, you have sinned. See to it that you gamble with small amounts and try to avoid the rolling of dice. It is too closely associated with the idolatry of fate and chance."

Finally, in chapter 17 Bartholomew asks whether or not divorced pastors should be allowed to preach. His answer: "By no means." But he gives no reason. In fact, it seems that the Apostle was struggling with his own marriage, and he needed more time to think this over. He did promise, however, to write a second letter to the saints in Bonavista. In that letter he would address all outstanding issues of the church "so that none of you remain in darkness about God's will for your life and that you be enabled to tell apart the nets of darkness from the nets of light." He added a footnote about Spanish nets being nets of darkness because their meshing is too small.

Isn't it wonderful that this letter was discovered? Finally we can set aside the struggles of the church, and avoid all these painful schisms that have beset us for centuries. God has provided us with all the answers for all the questions that have ever faced us. We can now settle down to the task of loving each other and bringing the gospel to those who need to hear it.

I wonder though, did the Apostle Bartholomew mean one 20th of your income before or after taxes? Now here's reason enough to start a new denomination, it seems to me. What will it be: the Reformed Church of Christ Before Taxes or the Reformed Church of Christ After Taxes?

BW

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When politicians attempt an apology

It's not difficult to become cynical in the face of what our federal politicians have been up to lately.

Earlier last year Ms. Sheila Copps made what appeared to be a clean break with the electorate when, after being assured that she could win, she resigned and ran again in her Hamilton riding to clear the air on her anti-GST statements made during the last federal election campaign.

Late in December, Prime Minister Jean Chretien made several half-hearted apologies about his earlier statements to kill the GST. Now we're into 1997, and ministers Allan Rock and Herb Gray offer qualified apologies about false accusations made in a letter by the RCMP against Brian Mulroney. But none of these men really made any mistakes.

Whenever someone apologizes and adds a "but" statement, it's not a real apology, some

wise person remarked. An apology should be clean and unequivocal.

That applies to us, too. True repentance removes all "buts." It's a hard lesson to learn. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me," sang David in Psalm 51. He added: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

Cynicism comes about by focussing too much on the failure of others. Not that we should forget what the Liberals are doing. But it's much better to act out of sinful solidarity, with a feeling of sadness rather than out of a sense of superiority.

Come next election, we would prescribe a sympathetically sorrowful defeat of phoney politicians.

BW

Letters

Lois Sweet respects the public role of faith

I always enjoy reading the column by David Koyzis. His insights are helpful in developing a Christian political perspective rooted in public justice for all people. David's column "What's a school for, anyway?" of Dec. 13 is another important contribution.

I just want to draw to David's and your readers' attention the fact that there is a substantial difference between Michael Valpy's privatistic views of "religion" and Lois Sweet's, as is evident in her report *The Fourth 'R' — Religion in our Classroom* (available from The Atkinson Charitable Foundation, c/o The Toronto Star, One Yonge St., Toronto, ON M5E 1E6; 416-869-4034).

Lois Sweet's genuine respect for the public role of faith is quite evident in some of her policy suggestions. Here are

a few of her suggestions:

- Local school boards could be given more control so they truly reflect the communities they serve. Let school boards determine the observance of religious holidays. If a school has a large number of Muslim students, say, the board could close that school for two of Islam's most significant holy days. At least, it could use these days to educate non-Muslim students about Islamic religious beliefs.
- School boards should be encouraged to introduce more diversity into their programs. In some provinces, however, legislative change would be required to permit religious alternative programs.
- Allow religious alternative programs within the public system. This means that parents could approach a school board

and ask, say, for a Sikh alternative school. If numbers warranted and if the school met certain conditions, the board could open such a program.

While Michael Valpy of *The Globe and Mail* has opposed such publicly funded education alternatives, Lois Sweet has the courage of conviction to advocate these bona fide public-policy options. Her advocacy is most encouraging, especially in the current political situation at Queen's Park.

The Harris government must be challenged by all of us who live in Ontario to deliver soon on its election campaign promises as they affect independent

Christian, Jewish and other explicitly religious schools. Maybe we can all write the premier a personal letter (Queen's Park, Toronto, ON M7A 1A1) urging the government to implement public policies and education programs that are based on parental choice and fiscal equity for all parents and students, without discrimination based on creed, faith, ideology, religion or values.

Gerald Vandezande
Government Relations Co-ordinator
Ontario Multi-Faith
Coalition for Equity in Education
Agincourt, Ont.

Rally should be judged by intent

I was disappointed to read Raymond Louter's reaction to the Free to Serve rally (Dec. 20). The Christian Reformed Church has suffered much brokenness, hurt and division in the recent past, and the intent of FTS was to encourage a communal celebration in which we would focus on what unifies us.

It was a difficult assignment for the organizers in Grand Rapids, for Darlene Koldenhoven in Los Angeles and for the local organizing committees. Many people gave much of themselves for this event because they deeply desired a gathering of God's people in a celebration of God's faithfulness — a positive, unifying time of praise and recognition of God's work among his people.

While Mr. Louter compared the FTS rally to certain secular productions and performance styles, I felt that his style of review resembled the reviews which secular productions might receive. I am saddened to think that a celebration of praise to God could receive such a negative review.

I realize that the chosen style and format did perhaps not meet the individual

tastes or expectations of all who attended. Perhaps smaller local production teams would have made the organization a little simpler and would have allowed the local areas to be reflected more truly. But this format was chosen for this rally. It may not have suited everyone, but it was not wrong.

We must work harder to build up, not plant seeds of negativism and further division.

I agree that the local stories were inspiring and that more such testimonies would have been very welcome. However, the rally in Ancaster, though it sought to include local flair, was not intended to reflect only the CRC of southern Ontario. We joined a rally which encompassed the Korean CRC, the black CRC, the Kurankos of Sierra Leone, as well as the churches in southern Ontario, which were "built by Pake and Beppe."

I believe that Mr. Louter has some helpful and creative ideas for Peter VanderMeulen, and I would encourage him to share them for possible future rallies.

Arlene Bennink
Ancaster, Ont.

Who wants critique, anyway?

It was with sadness and a touch of anger that I read [Ray Louter's review of the Free to Serve rally and Marian Van Til's review of Jimmy Carter's new book, *Living Faith*].

I went to Free to Serve in Hamilton and was thoroughly blessed and inspired by the music, acting, dancing and the testimonies of what God is doing through his people — it was a wonderful celebration. What I find a little confusing is why Mr. Louter went off into a history of the Broadway show and the star system it fostered. I really doubt anyone cares for such analytical observations and critique on what was really a party for God.

Admit it. It was a really good time and

the criticism is unwarranted. Was this event inspired by God or not?

Also, again why the shortsightedness on Ms. Van Til's part? Mr. Carter is a man committed to helping others in Christ's name and I doubt a visit to Calvin College's library would be a great awakening for him. I say God bless him and lead him as he works in this world. Christianity is diverse and its many denominations and peoples are touching this world in Christ's name.

We Christians should be building each other up with words of encouragement, not criticism. I say, *Vive la difference!*

Patrick Panza
Mississauga, Ont.

Why support a group that hurts the family?

Can we as Christian women support the Advisory Council on the Status of Women? Perhaps Kathryn Posthumus and Ineke Bezuyen are not aware of this group's radical feminist agenda. Let me give you a bit of information on this council.

This group opened its June 9-11, 1995, meeting with a "prayer and smudge to call on ancestral spirits to bring wisdom and energy to the meeting." Can a Christian support such a prayer? At this meeting a video called "Unholy Alliance" was shown, which discredits by way of distortions and lies pro-life organizations, and especially Human Life International.

Katherine McDonald, president of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the

Status of Women, is a past president of Planned Parenthood (a pro-abortion group). She attacks REAL Women (a pro-life, pro-family group) as promoting hatred and bigotry.

As Christians we should not support a group that is pro-abortion, ridicules [the Christian] religion and is in favor of same-sex relationships. We are giving this group 16 million tax dollars to destroy what we value.

We should support Sharon Hayes for her stand for the equality of women but not at the expense of the family. We should write our provincial governments to abolish this feminist tax-funded group.

Melinda VanderVeer
Cornwall, Ont.

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Advice

Peter and Marja

are
IN

Dear P & M:

I'm really worried about my youngest daughter. She is married to someone several years older who controls her completely. She is not allowed to visit her family because he needs her. The only contact I have with her is through calling her at work. I try to tell her that it is not normal to be kept from seeing her family.

Before they were married I had a gut feeling about him. We tried to point these things out to her but she said she loved him and that he loved her. We've tried talking to him directly but we always get the same answer: she is responsible for his happiness! How can anyone hold that attitude? We've even offered them counseling at our

expense, but they don't see the need.

Although it is her birthday tomorrow she is not allowed to have her family over. She is also not allowed to come to us. We're at our wits' end. Last week I bought her a book about abuse but I don't know if she will read it. I have sent it to her at work, so at least I know she'll receive it.

What can we do? We pray for both of them, but it is so hard to see her have so little freedom. We had a good relationship with her when she lived at home. I just pray that the Lord will open her eyes. I'm so worried and scared for her.

Dear Worried:

Your anxiety is under-

Loving and letting go is hard to do

standable. Any parent would be concerned and upset under such circumstances. But you have to be very careful because your attempts to draw your daughter closer may actually be pushing her farther away.

Basically, you've done everything you can do. Before they were married you shared your concerns about your future son-in-law. After their marriage you talked to them directly, offered them counseling at your expense and even sent her a book on abuse.

These attempts to prevent and then improve the marriage may have painted your son-in-law into a corner. Since a controlling person is a very insecure person, he has probably decided that he has no use for anyone who does not accept him. Ironically, he may have concluded that you are an interfering mother-in-law who is just as controlling as you accuse him to be.

This battle between in-laws has put your daughter into the unenviable position of having to choose sides. Since she is in love and married, what choice does she have but to side with her husband?

Recently we heard of a mother who took a very wise approach when dealing with a wayward son. She said something to this effect: "I'm very concerned about your lifestyle. Here are the reasons why. I'm only going to say this once. I won't bring it up again, but I'll pray for you every day. And I'll always love you." This mother kept her promise. Many years later, this son came around and even professed his faith in the Lord, proving that silence can be golden after you've spoken your piece.

Like that son, your daughter has heard your concerns. There's nothing more you need to say. One last time tell her that you'll always be there for her but that you will not initiate any more conversations on this topic. Then let it go. Try to accept and love him as well as her. Take your reservations to the Lord.

By backing off, one of two possibilities will, we hope, emerge. If there is a power imbalance in their marriage and your son-in-law is overly controlling and even abusive, then your daughter will come to you for help when she's more mature

or when the balance is upset by something significant like the birth of a child.

But if your son-in-law is basically a good man who has been turned off by the criticisms of his wife's family, then both of them will eventually come around once they feel your acceptance. Either way your daughter needs to do her own growing. All you need to do now is give her the freedom and space to come to her own conclusions.

Can you do this? Yes, you can. It will be difficult, but you can do it with God's help. Just remember that all your past attempts to change the situation have been ineffective. Also remind yourself that your relationship with your daughter is built on a good foundation.

Write to: P & M, 16 Kimmbermont Drive, St. Catharines, ON L2N 5V6.

Peter and Marja Slofstra are a pastor and wife team living in St. Catharines, Ont. They are assisted by an advisory panel consisting of Herman de Jong, Bill Lidkea, Alan Vandermaas, Marian Van Til and Bert Witvoet.

Environment

Creation waits...



John Wood

John R. Wood

Occasionally I hear someone say, "You know, the environment just isn't my thing." This is usually followed with a qualifier like, "I'm not a fanatic," "not a New Ager," "not a nature freak." Or sometimes it's, "I've got lots of other interests"; or "I just don't have time for all that stuff." You can add your favorite disclaimer here.

But I start wondering just what part of the environment isn't "your thing." Is it the eating part, or the drinking part? Or maybe it's the breathing part that you're not interested in anymore?

You see, interest in the environment isn't an option for any of us. The stark choice

before us is: care for the environment or die.

It doesn't matter what your size, weight, language group or IQ is. Neither do gender distinctions, social status, age, cohorts, nor politics enter into this question. We are all environmentalists!

Jesus joined our world

Moses put it this way in his farewell instructions to the Israelites: "This day I call heaven and earth as witness against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deut. 30:19).

Sometimes we make the choices of life complex when

'The environment just isn't my thing'

they are not. All of us must either "fear the Lord" or not. How we respond to the environmental issues of our day is a good barometer of that choice.

We live in a created world. A messy, earthy, rocky, wet, even slimy world that includes the marvel of the Incarnation.

This idea is so common place to us, so stylized in our communal worship that we can easily miss the gritty nature of our spiritual lives. We live out our faith — faithfully or not — in these corporeal entities, our bodies.

Even God isn't afraid of our earthly circumstances. Jesus had to be cleaned-up, both when he entered it and when he was buried. Birth and death are very humanizing (or should I say "humus-izing") processes.

Just how startling this earthly nature of the gospel is came home to me in a report from some missionary friends teaching English as a second language at a university in China.

People who had never heard

the gospel recoiled at the thought of a king or god being born in a dirty stable! How crude! But there it is, God is in the midst of life, from low to high. He didn't hesitate to enter our environment to heal the one agent that can bring about a substantial change to the earth.

Caring for creation isn't a special interest

You still say the environment isn't your thing? If you care about justice, then the environment is your concern. If you care about peace on earth, ditto. If you care about giving a cup of cold water, or feeding the hungry, or clothing the naked, or healing the sick, then cast your eye on the environmental issues of the day.

We don't have many options here. The environment isn't some special interest group item, to be taken or left. It is quite simply a matter of life and death. Not just for a few tweety birds or rare plants I have never seen and never will.

Still not with me? Try this quiz. What is the underlying cause of all our contemporary environmental issues? For instance, what is the basic cause of water pollution in the Great Lakes? What would cause the people from two of the greatest democracies on earth to foul the basins where 20 per cent of the world's freshwater resides at any moment?

A friend of mine has asked this question in surveys of secular university students. The root cause they report is human greed. The environment isn't a special interest, it is rather a central concern of our day. It asks us the same questions as always. Whom do you trust, what do you want, and what are you going to do?

So what will it be? Choose life or choose death. It's an environmental question.

John R. Wood teaches environmental science at The King's University College in Edmonton.

Arts/Media

Film review

An amazing miniature universe like you've never seen before

Marian Van Til

Microcosmos

Rated Family. Directed by Claude Nuridsany and Marie Perennou. Produced by Galatee Films, France.

The production of this film took 15 years of research, two years of equipment design and three years of actual shooting.

What kind of story would require that kind of time commitment and meticulous care? One that draws us into a world "beyond anything we can imagine, yet almost beneath our notice," says the film: the microcosm of insects on one "ordinary" day in a French meadow.

No ordinary thing

Within a couple of minutes of the film's opening, however, we realize that there is nothing "ordinary" about this tiny God-created world that we usually either ignore or recoil from (many of us having grown up in a mind set that wants to eradicate "bugs").

If you've seen micro-photography before, you may think this film won't surprise you. But that's quite unlikely. Nuridsany and Perennou's camera reveals an astonishing array of insects

doing what insects do, but what we rarely see them do: eat, fight, mate, work, travel and deal with the elements. But *how* they do these things is often astonishing — and amusing.

Except for a few scattered sentences of narration, there's no script — at least not one written by human hands. Only a highly effective musical score and the sounds (or simulated sounds) of the insects themselves accompany the unfolding of this awe-inspiring world:

Two male scarab beetles lock their formidable front pincers in battle as if they are giant stags locking antlers in rutting season; a well-organized army of ants excavates part of a new hill and hauls in provisions to keep everybody well-fed — every "soldier" hauls dirt clods and seeds far bigger than himself; a spider lays a deadly snare for a grasshopper and within seconds has him wrapped up like a mummy in soft but lethal, silken threads; a variety of insects skate across the top of a pond, dipping into the seemingly elastic water for food or a drink when necessary; a pair of mating snails lock in a lovely face-to-face embrace, seeming to gently kiss each other; a procession of caterpillars sets off to only-they-know-where, one after the other, until dozens have joined the parade — and when a second line

parade intersects the first, individuals from one line wait for individuals of the second line, in alternation, like highway traffic merging from two lanes into one.

These are but a few of the odd and remarkable sights the film makers capture in a universe in which a day can be an inhabitant's lifetime, a raindrop is like a tubful of water, a pond is an ocean, and a few hundred yards are like miles.

Shouts the Creator's praise

Perhaps without meaning to, Galatee Films has produced a film which shouts praise to God the Creator in every frame. Such is the pulling power of *Microcosmos* that the many children in the audience sat in rapt silence as its wonderful wordless story unfolded before them (with the unhappy exception of two families who came in late, the parents of which not only allowed their kids to talk out loud throughout, but carried on a conversation with them).

This is an absolute must-see film, for all ages, families, schools, churches, youth groups or any other groups. If possible, see it while it's still in theatres on the big screen. But if you miss it there, be sure to look for it when it comes out on video.

British distributor bans hard-hitting book about Satan

Dan Wooding

BELLFLOWER, Calif. — New Zealand-born author Ray Comfort's hard-hitting book about Satan called *Bride of Heaven, Pride of Hell*, has been banned by a distributor in Britain because of a frightening picture of a demon that appears on the first page, the author asserts.

Comfort, who now lives in Southern California and has written 30 books, says that a distributor in the United Kingdom — which he declined to name — has informed his U.S. publisher, Bridge-Logos based in New Jersey, that it will not carry the book because of what happens when the book is opened in sunlight.

Appearing demon scary?

"As light dawns on the first page, the frightening face of a demon magically appears on the light-sensitive paper," Comfort says. "This seems to have scared them off from handling the book. It is true that the image is scary, but the message of the book is even scarier." Respected British author Leonard Ravenhill, who read it before he

passed away, had only one word for the book: "Shattering!"

Comfort says, "When my publisher first informed me of this U.K. distributor's decision, I was dumbfounded. My thought was that this was censorship of the worst kind. Surely adult readers should be allowed to make up their own minds as to whether or not the image frightened them. I am sure that Americans would not appreciate such an infringement on their personal liberty, because it is a fundamental right to be able to choose what literature we read."

Ray Comfort's teachings have been commended by respected authors such as David Wilkerson, Dave Hunt, Dr. D. James Kennedy, and many other Christian leaders. His insightful videos were seen by 30,000 pastors in 1992.

He says he has some advice for readers regarding the banned book. "Don't let anything stop you from reading it. Don't stay in the dark as to what is happening in these closing hours of time. Let the light expose Satan's greatest last days' strategy."

U.S. TV networks adopt ratings system

Marian Van Til

NEW YORK — Concerned with growing television violence and other programming unsuitable for children, the major networks and many cable stations in the U.S. will, within six months, begin carrying ratings on their programs. The ratings were devised by a committee made up of members of the television industry.

Canadian television industry watchers say a similar move is likely in Canada.

There are six ratings, two of which apply only to children's programming. The ratings are:

TV-Y, All Children.

Suitable for all children: themes are specifically designed for young children, especially those between two and six years old.

TV-Y7, Directed to Older

Children.

Suitable for children aged seven and older, after kids have developed the ability to distinguish between make-believe and reality. May contain mild physical or comedic violence, but may frighten children under age seven.

TV-G, General Audience.

Suitable for all ages, but not necessarily specifically for children.

TV-PG, Parental Guidance Suggested.

May contain some material some parents would find unsuitable for younger children to watch, or watch alone: may contain occasional coarse language, limited violence, suggestive sexual dialogue and situations.

TV-14, Parents Strongly Cautioned.

May contain material many

parents would find unsuitable for kids under 14 years old. Parents are urged not to allow children under 14 to watch such programming, or to watch it without parental input. It may contain sophisticated themes, sexual content, strong language and some violence.

TV-M, Mature Audience Only.

Programming specifically aimed at adults (unsuitable for children under 17), containing "mature themes," possible profane language, explicit sexual content or graphic violence.

The ratings will appear on the screen at the start of a program. TVs equipped with a "V-chip" will be able to block shows parents consider unsuitable for their children.

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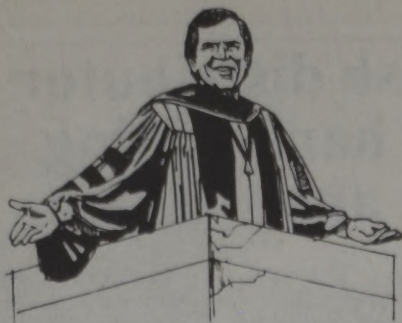
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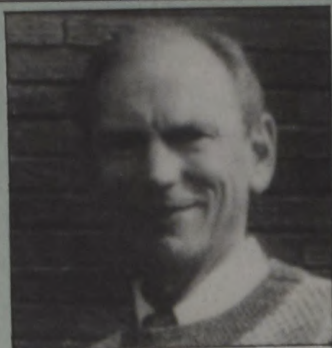
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Feature



Be sensitive to the Spirit's leading

Mike Reitsma
First CRC, Calgary



1. I like to preach series of sermons, either from a book of the Bible (we just completed a very challenging series on Nehemiah), or a specific portion of Scripture (we are at present deeply engaged in the Sermon on the Mount). This forces a person (me) to preach on some topics that I would otherwise probably not deal with.

2. I always try to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's specific leading. For example, this past spring some unwholesome talk (gossip) was going around and the Lord prompted us to deal with it. So I preached a very direct message on gossip.

3. Special times of the year (Advent, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc.) require specific messages. I try to find challenging and appropriate Scriptures dealing with these special times.

4. Special emphases Sundays require specific messages (e.g., Mission Sundays, or the first Sunday in September, the beginning of the church year, a message on vision, or twice a year, a special message on financial stewardship).

5. Sometimes we need to hear what God has to say about special needs within the congregation (e.g., marriage breakdown).

6. Sometimes I take a very subjective approach. I will be reading a book, an article, or listening to a tape and I will "hear" the Lord prompting me to preach on that topic.

In all of this I try to find appropriate Scriptures that speak to the matter. I am deeply committed to allowing the Word to speak to me first, and then to the people I serve.

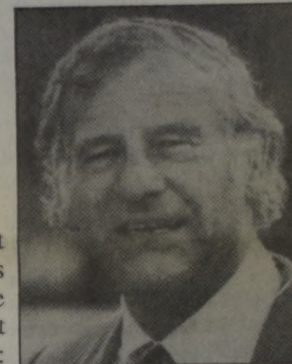
The anomaly of the homily and the reaching before the preaching

How pastors choose texts on which to preach

Christian Courier asked four Christian Reformed pastors how they choose a text for their sermons. All of us submit ourselves to preaching on a regular basis. It may not always be clear to us why the preacher has chosen to enlighten us on a particular passage in the Bible. Perhaps this small sampling will help us understand how and why sermons are based on certain texts.

Word and world in a reformational context

Jack Hielema
CRC of Prince George, B.C.



An old Dutch preacher has pointed out that the pulpit must not drive us to the text, but the text must drive us to the pulpit. It is this kind of urgency and enthusiasm that has been in my life, thanks be to God, ever since I felt called to preaching and shepherding. But "being driven" to the pulpit, I often exclaim with the Apostle Paul: "Who is capable of doing this work?" (2 Cor. 3:5). Many times (as the people were leaving church) I have wanted to call them back and tell them that I should have challenged them in different ways and that I did not have the creative skills to take the mighty truths of Scripture and make them the lively oracles of God.

1. A text, as I experience this, must be born out of an intimate contact with four things: God's Word, the situation of God's people in his world, a response to the cultural and missionary mandate, and one's personality — and all this in a reformational context as explained, for example, in Gordon Spykman's book on reformational theology/philosophy.

2. The above is a tremendous task, but is in my heart, more or less, when I prepare my sermons. I believe I have a very childlike faith that the Bible is God's infallible Word, but it is my daily prayer that I may experience the Scriptures, that the pathos of the prophets and apostles may move me and others and overwhelm our hearts and lives, giving us courage to live in Christ's light in the darkness of this world.

3. My last point is this: I often wonder whether I'm competent to give guidance on the arts of communication because I feel inadequate to communicate beyond my own specialized theological world. Deep down I feel that preachers and pastors have the wrong kind of training. Unless the theologian is in constant dialogue with Christian scientists, philosophers, psychologists and the person in the street, etc., the preacher will have a very difficult time speaking in such a way that the common people hear him or her gladly. Truth, in the widest sense, needs to be remolded in the inner being until it can be uttered with simplicity and power.

From desperation to inspiration

John Postuma
Maranatha CRC, York, Ont.



In the early years of my ministry, the choice of a sermon text was frequently determined under the pressure of providing information for the bulletin before the due date. The result, I confess, was that the choice was often made in desperation!

Thankfully, the Lord has matured me in the meantime to depend on his leading. Does the Holy Spirit ever prompt me to preach on certain themes and Scripture passages? Often. The choice of sermon texts is a matter of divine prompting through the vehicles of planning and prayer. In fact, prayer is the key to selecting sermon texts.

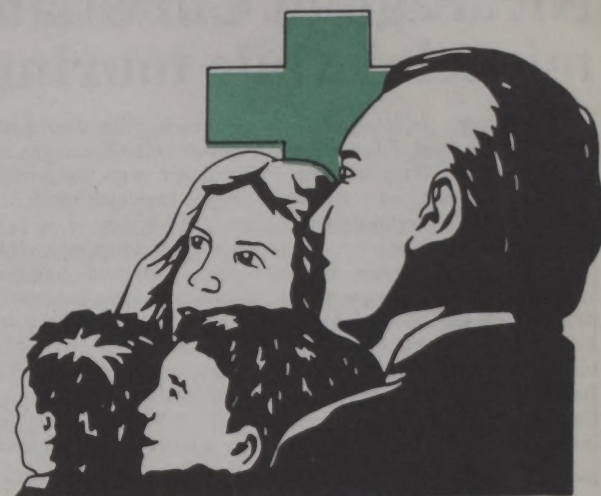
Much of my preaching schedule is determined by the church calendar, and can, therefore, be planned months in advance. For Advent and Christmas, passages from the Old Testament prophecies and the Gospels come to mind, while I focus on the final chapters of the Gospels at Easter, and on the opening chapters of Acts at Ascension and Pentecost. For events like Mother's Day, Father's Day and Thanksgiving I will choose appropriate stories of Scripture, or from the Psalms. I find it fitting to leave God's people with a blessing on New Year's Eve and will, therefore, choose one of the benedictions or doxologies in the Bible.

The New Year's Day sermon sets the direction for the coming year. For example, since we will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Maranatha church in York in October 1997, the focus for the year will be "building on blessings," under the theme of "Forty Years of God's Faithfulness," based on Ephesians 1:3. The theme song to correspond will be "How Vast the Benefits Divine."

But what about the many Sundays between these celebrations? There are a number of options which come to mind. Sometimes I will focus on a particular theme or Bible book and will preach a short series of three to five sermons. (Years ago I presented 43 sermons on Revelation and both the congregation and I were relieved when that marathon was over!)

Also most helpful for me is to discuss the preaching with the elders. I appreciate hearing what is on their hearts, which passages of Scripture inspire them, and learning from them what the needs are within the congregation. In fact, congregation members are given an opportunity at the beginning of the year to submit suggestions for sermons.

Prayer is fundamental to this planning, as I mentioned before. In my ministry, sermon preparation is a priority. I guard each morning for personal devotion and worship, for study and sermon preparation, and for planning worship services. All of this work is bathed in prayer. The result is that I don't waste precious time struggling with the choice of next Sunday's sermon text. The choice has already been made through prayer and planning. Thus, as I sense the anointing of God's Spirit, the choice of Sunday's texts are made, not in desperation, but by inspiration.



Bible supports the series, not the series the Bible

Evert Busink
First CRC, Brandon, Manitoba



I am a "vision-driven" pastor: everything must flow out of our vision of ministry to make disciples and to change lives. Therefore, my messages always have a bottom line: how will this change lives and make mature disciples for Jesus? My congregation must be out there living and witnessing for Christ, so I must equip them to be successful. I will only preach on texts and topics that serve to accomplish that goal.

I prefer to preach in four- to eight-week series. Tithing is an annual topic. Usually I preach a series on discipleship and Christian maturity each year. I will usually use Lent for spiritual revival, Easter through Pentecost to speak about Christ's lordship and living in the Spirit, and Advent for the second coming and new commitment.

Although this sounds topical, I am an expository preacher. That is, I do not make the Bible support the series, but use the series to explain the Bible. I always make it a point to show how every text, from Genesis to Revelation, points to Jesus. I also assume there are non-Christians and hypocrites in church to hear the gospel and make a commitment to Jesus.

To sum up, my task is to equip my people to make disciples and to live for Jesus every day. My messages are chosen to help them do that.

Church

Nicaraguan Christian singer receives 'a miracle' while touring Eastern Canada

Dan Wooding

Ernesto Palacios, 34, a member of the New Jerusalem Trio from Nicaragua, was legally blind when he recently toured Ontario. Not anymore.

The trio toured for four weeks with Rev. Wally Featherston, director of ASSIST Canada, to help raise funds for humanitarian and Christian efforts in their own country. But during their stay Ernesto found himself on the receiving end of

a 'miracle.' He returned with Featherston to Nicaragua in late November with his sight restored in one eye, thanks to the combined efforts of an eye-surgeon from Guelph, eyeglasses from an optical company in Woodstock, and the costs of his hospital covered by his friends at ASSIST Canada. ASSIST Canada is part of an international fellowship of ministries with offices in Mexico, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the

United States.

"Ernesto had lost complete sight in one eye and 90 per cent vision in the second following an eye infection four years ago," explains Featherston. "A wonderful eye surgeon from Guelph, Dr. Robert Johnson, heard about his plight and agreed to perform the surgery on a cataract, and to insert a new lens in the one eye that could be saved. Palacios now has 20-20 vision in that eye."

"After the operation we discovered that he still had a small long-distance sight defect which has since been rectified through Woodstock optician Herb Diestler, who provided him with the necessary eyeglasses."

Palacios says, "This was a true miracle of God. I never thought I would ever be able to see properly again. But God has intervened."

Featherston notes that the story doesn't end there. After a meeting in a church in Innerkip, Ont., a dentist from nearby London, Dr. Mark Richardson, offered to do any dental work that Ernesto needed. It was another miracle of God for Ernesto, who

had over two hours of dental work completed during his stay in Canada."

Emotional reunion

Featherston went back to Nicaragua with the now sighted Palacios to his home country. "It was a very emotional experience to be with him there as he was tearfully greeted by his wife, two children, and other relatives," Featherston said. "They kept hugging and kissing me, and thanking me and the Lord for the wonderful blessings that had come to Ernesto during his stay in Canada. It was a very humbling experience."

'San Juan '98' congress to formulate 21st century strategy to reach Hispanics with the gospel

Dan Wooding

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Leading Anglo-Christian leaders in the United States will be joining with Hispanic leaders for an historic international congress on Hispanic evangelism to be held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, May 25-30, 1998.

Called "San Juan '98," the congress is being organized by Rev. Raimundo Jimenez, founder and president of the Hispanic Christian Communications Network based in Los Angeles. The congress wants to

formulate a 21st century strategy to reach Hispanics both in the U.S. and the whole of the Spanish-speaking world.

Well-known evangelicals such as Pastor Jack Hayford (senior pastor of the Church on the Way, Van Nuys, Calif.), Dr. Bill Bright (president of Campus Crusade for Christ), and evangelists Luis Palau and Alberto Mottesi have agreed to act as honorary co-chairs for San Juan '98.

Latin leaders like Luis Palau, Alberto Mottesi, Nicky Cruz,

Hermano Pablo and others are expected to speak at the congress, as is Franklin Graham, president of Samaritan's Purse and vice-president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

The congress will also bring together leading Anglo ministries which have demonstrated a burden for the Hispanic world and which want to reach the Latin world with the gospel.

A man of God

Organizer Jimenez is described by Hayford as "carrying in his heart a God-given fire for evangelism amongst the Hispanic people worldwide." Hayford says he supports the congress because "it is the time to strategize and, with Holy-Spirit sensitivity, move ahead on a co-ordinated campaign of gospel presentation to the growing millions of Hispanics ... who need a relationship with Jesus Christ."

Jimenez himself struggled with the idea of the congress for two years. "The last thing I wanted," he says, "was involvement in a project of the magnitude of San Juan '98, especially if there was no defined purpose for it."

But after seeking the Lord in fasting and prayer he feels it is the Lord's will that he go ahead with the project, and the enthusiastic response of others has confirmed that. "I am truly amazed at the way the Lord has been moving," Jimenez says. "San Juan '98 will truly be a mission encounter on the threshold of a new millennium."

CRC asked to seek healing for aboriginal peoples

Bert Witvoet

EDMONTON — In an open letter to Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, the committee for ministry with Indians and Metis in Canada is asking CRC congregations to examine the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples, especially those which challenge Christian communities to educate themselves about Native issues.

The committee, which is an arm of the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, asks congregations "to pray with us that Christ will break the chains of despair, violence and death just as he did on that glorious morning when he arose."

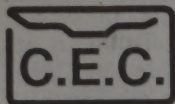
The committee for ministry with Indians and Metis met with staff of the denomination's three Native ministry centres and community representatives of those ministries to discuss the response of CRC congregations to the recently released report on Aboriginal peoples.

It cites the disparities between Native and non-Native peoples: Third-World poverty and disease rates, miserable housing conditions as well as the highest suicide rates in the industrial world.

The unhealed rifts between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples directly affect many Christian Reformed churches, says the committee in its open letter. It mentions how "the legacy of the broken relationship between Canada and aboriginal peoples smoulder in the hearts and lives of those who visit the CRC's Native ministries centres [in Winnipeg, Regina and Edmonton] daily."

The committee sees in these aboriginal brothers and sisters in Christ "the frustration and despair of centuries-long struggles for land, basic human rights and dignity." It ends its letter with the prayer that "we can walk together as aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in this land, sowing seeds of justice and healing which will gather a harvest of peace and reconciliation."

Look for Peter and Marja
on page 6...

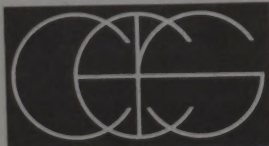


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Matthew's message about Jesus and Israel

Matthew's gospel message comes to us not only in his stories about Jesus, but also in the way he arranges these stories.

Take, for instance, his genealogy. What message does he imply by including these four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and "Uriah's wife"? All four come from outside the blue-blood line of Israel. One was a professional prostitute; one acted as a prostitute; and "Uriah's wife" is a painful reminder of a scandal in the life of David, the best King Israel ever had.

So what's the story? The implied message casts doubt on Israel's merit and nobility but makes us praise God's grace and initiative for the birth of the Messiah.

Next, look how Matthew sums up Israel's history: "Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ" (1:17). In order to get his desired number of 3 times 14, Matthew has omitted a few.

And what is his implied message? We cannot be absolutely sure. The numerical value of David's Hebrew name (omitting the vowels) is 14 (D=4, W=6, D=4). And Matthew's great emphasis is that Jesus is the Son of David to whom the promised throne belongs forever. So, the whole of Israel's history echoes: David! David! David!

Or, the point is in the sevens, the fullness: the history from the beginning (Abraham) to the golden age (David) to the pits (the Exile) brings us to the fulfillment (Christ).

Tears of a loving father

In chapter two Matthew tells the story of an angry king who murders all the baby boys, but the savior of the people escapes the sword. Who is it? Maybe you think the story is about Israel and Moses. Yes and no. It's really about Jesus.

"Out of Egypt I called my son" (2:15). In Hosea 11:1 "son" refers to Israel. But now the son is Jesus. If there is a chapter in the Bible in which you can taste the tears of a loving Father, it is Hosea 11. The willful disobedience of his son forces God the Father to punish him. And yet: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?" (v.8). Now God has called his son from Egypt for the second time. This is the second Exodus. And Jesus is corporate Israel.

How much God loves his son is shown in the water — when he saved Israel in the Red Sea and when he approved of Jesus ("This is my beloved Son"). But after that baptism, Israel and Jesus had to be tested in the wilderness, for 40 years or (Jesus) 40 days.

What was the purpose of the testing? "The LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years — to test you in order to know... whether or not you would keep his commands... (and) to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes out of the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:2,3). Living is not having something to put into your mouth but listening to what comes out of God's mouth. So, Jesus passed the course which Israel had flunked (Matt 4:4).

Jesus relives and fulfils the role of Israel. He is Israel in one Person. Without him the Jews are lost and the Gentiles have no hope. But when they are joined to him, Jew and Gentile inherit the blessings of Abraham.

Andrew Kuyvenhoven, a retired pastor of the Christian Reformed Church and former editor of *The Banner*, lives in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Committee recommends no article on marriage in church order of united Dutch church

THE NETHERLANDS — In the future United Protestant Church of the Netherlands, the church order should not have an article on marriage. This was the recommendation of a special committee to study marriage. The three churches working toward unity, two Reformed churches and one Lutheran, were deeply divided about the appearance of an article on marriage. They set up a broad-based committee that has been studying the matter for about six months.

The committee reflected two main lines of thinking in the churches, but both leading to the same conclusion. The majority supported the view that marriage is from antiquity a societal concern and not an ecclesiastical one. The church adds nothing to marriage to make it valid. The church may celebrate the formation of a marriage, thus supplying a faith perspective on the marriage. Its main connection to marriage is liturgical.

The church also supports other relationships, according to this line of thinking. The Apostle Paul argued for celibacy, and the church has supported celibate community life. Earlier in history, economic and family connections played a greater role in marriage. Today the emphasis lies on the personal choices and the relationship of the couple. This emphasis also applies to other relationships, such as a homosexual one, the committee said. Other relationships could be recognized within the church as "life commitments."

Traditional view a minority view

A second line of thought, supported by a minority in the committee, also began with the idea that marriage is a public concern. Marriage is a God-intended order for society in the creation. Men and women are given to each other for holy living, as God intended.

Marriage protects sexuality and provides a place for children of the next generation. In this view the church has a liturgical connection, which comes after the public closure of the marriage.

The church must be very cautious, this sector of the committee argued, about blessing

non-marital relationships. The church order should provide space for services of "vows, prayers and blessings," for single persons who wish to make a commitment to a calling of a special nature or to community living. But these should be clearly distinguished from marriage ceremonies.

Deep divisions

The whole committee recognized that the churches are deeply divided. A majority has spoken for the right to truthful homosexual relations. That does not mean those relations are equivalent to marriage, the committee stated. While this should lead the churches to create some "service of vows, prayers and blessings," the present divisions make this impossible.

The committee recommended the churches continue the discussions about the biblical testimony on these questions. They recommended the new church order give room for local op-

tions. Thus, there should be no article on marriage in the church order.

On the other hand, some mention should be made in the church order article on worship services, the committee said. The church should make place for recognition of relationships, but the committee remained divided on just how "marriage and other relations" should be described in that article.

The committee report was dated Nov. 7-9, during a meeting of a combined synod of the three churches. The synod, like the churches, was divided. Some delegates objected the committee had too easily accepted the position that the church had only a liturgical function in marriage. Nevertheless, the report was provisionally accepted. A final adoption of the new church order will take place only after review by regional and local church gatherings. The full report will be among materials given to local meetings.

CRC pastor heads Calgary ministers' group

Gordon Legge

CALGARY — A Calgary Christian Reformed pastor was elected president of one of the city's most influential and active ministerial organizations at a November meeting.

Rev. Mike Reitsma, minister of First CRC, now heads the 200-member Calgary Evangelical Ministerial Association. "I really think this is an important thing and I plan to put my heart into it," says Reitsma, 52. "I have a burden for the city."

As Reitsma drove into Calgary from California in 1989, he says the first panoramic view he got of the city made him feel "a powerful sense of God's presence over it." He feels strongly about working for unity among Christians in his adopted city.

Attending the luncheon at which Reitsma was elected were representatives from the mainline churches: Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran and United. They were there to report on the significance of Covenant 1996, an agreement between these four churches to co-operate as much as possible.

Reitsma was pleased to see

this happening in mainline churches, he said, and hopes his evangelical association can play a small part in encouraging unity among Christians.

Reitsma and his wife, Ruth Ann, have three daughters, and a son who is on his way to a baseball career with the Boston Red Sox.

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If you wish a photo included, send us the original.</p> <p>d) <i>Christian Courier</i> will not be responsible for any errors due to handwritten or phoned-in advertisements.</p> <p>e) The rate shown above for classifieds covers any length up to five column inches. <i>Christian Courier</i> reserves the right to charge for additional column inches at the rate of \$15.00 per column inch (GST incl.).</p> <p>NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS We offer a one-year subscription for only \$25.00 (GST incl.) to the couples whose wedding is announced in the <i>Christian Courier</i> and to the parents of the child whose birth announcement appears in our paper. To facilitate matters, we encourage those who request the wedding or birth announcement to enclose \$25.00 and the couple's correct address.</p> <p>Christian Courier 4-261 Martindale Rd. St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1 Phone: (905) 682-8311 Fax: (905) 682-8313</p> | <p>DUPON: We like to thank our friends, relatives and neighbors who made our 50th wedding anniversary such a special day. Thanks so much for the visits, cards and best wishes. Larry and Shirley Dupon, Townsend, Ont.</p> <p>Birthdays</p> <p>VANDERLEEK:</p>  <p><i>Congratulations to Grietje VanderLeek (nee Mantel) on the occasion of her 90th birthday!</i></p> <p>Andyk, N.H. Grimsby, Ont. 1907 February 1 1997 Happy 90th birthday to our dear mom, oma and great-grandmother GRIETJE VANDERLEEK (nee MANTEL) With love and best wishes from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Kees & Diet VanderLeek — St. Catharines, Ont. Nel & Henk Homsveld — Hamilton, Ont. Thea & Bob Kempenaar — Vineland, Ont. Piet & Joke VanderLeek — Langley, B.C. 16 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren. Friends and family are invited to celebrate with us by coming to an open house on Feb. 1, 1997, at Shalom Manor, 12 Bartlett Ave., Grimsby, Ont. Address: Mrs. G. VanderLeek, 12 Bartlett Ave., Grimsby, ON L3M 4N5 Phone: (905) 945-1448</p> |  <p>1952 January 18 1997 With hearts filled with thanksgiving and praise we celebrate the 45th anniversary of our parents and Opa and Oma</p> <p>JOHN and WILLEMINA KAMPHUIS (nee ENSERINK) May God continue to bless the two of you in your lives together as He has richly blessed us through you. With love, Hank & Valerie Kamphuis Matthew, Nicholas, Mitchell, Amber Gerald & Jane Kamphuis Alissa, Martin, Kristopher, Anthony Joanne & Alan McIsaac Andrew, Joshua, Stephen, Michael John Jr. & Heather Kamphuis Andrea, Carolyn Bernadine & Klaas Germs Rachel, Isaac, Hannah Wilma & Ted Harris Amanda, Brent, Kelly, Mitchell Tony & Ruth Ann Kamphuis Calvin, John, ? Chns & Will Bezemer Kyle, Talia, ? Address: 9 Park Rd. S., Grimsby, ON L3M 2N8</p> | <p>"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies..." (John 11:25) On Saturday, Jan. 4, 1997, the Lord took unto Himself</p> <p>JETJE BOERSMA (KONYNENBELT) in her 94th year Beloved wife of the late Douwe Boersma. Dear mother of Sandra & Peter Damsma — Clinton, Ont. Shirley & Bert Branderhorst — Exeter, Ont. Gerry & Annie Boersma — Exeter, Ont. Janny & Steve Elgersma — Dunnville, Ont. Peter & Audrey Boersma — Exeter, Ont.</p> <p>Also survived by 24 grandchildren and 40 great-grandchildren. The funeral service was held at the Chr. Ref. Church in Exeter, Ont., on Monday, Jan. 6, 1997, with Rev. Peter Tuininga officiating. Interment at Meadowvale Cemetery, Brampton, Ont. Correspondence address: Gerry Boersma, 31 Church Street, Exeter, ON N0M 1S2</p> <p>Dec. 21, 1914 - Dec. 21, 1996 After a long and difficult road of illness since his stroke eight years ago, the Lord, in His mercy called our husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather</p> <p>WICHER BURGIER home to Himself early Saturday morning, Dec. 21, 1996, on his birthday. "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps. 23:6). Lovingly remembered by his wife Janna Burgler, Listowel. His daughters: Hammie & Klaas Holman — Mt. Brydges Tina & Klaas Donkersgoed — Moorefield Rita & John Donkersgoed — Moorefield Cathy & Jake Raben — Wallenstein Helen & Del Aguiar — Listowel His sons: Casey & Kathy Burgler — Orangeville Willie Burgler — Saskatoon Hank Burgler — Alliston Charles & Joan Burgler — Alliston Harry & Lori Burgler — Stayner Tony Burgler — Stayner and 38 grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren, two sisters and three brothers. Predeceased by one son, John, three grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Correspondence address: Mrs. Janna Burgler, 370 Davidson Ave. N., Listowel, ON N4W 3A5</p> | <p>GRACE HONCOOP (NOTENBOMER) of Abbotsford, B.C., passed away peacefully on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 1997, in her 72nd year. She was predeceased by her first husband Jack Notenbomer of Mt. Lehman, and her brother Webb Westerhof of Terrace, B.C. She is survived by her loving husband Joe Honcoop and her children: Harry (Dianne) — Gerouxville, Alta. Marty (Tina) — Monarch, Alta. Al (Margaret) — Leduc, Alta. Jean — the Netherlands Ted (Cindy) — Abbotsford, B.C. Bob (Lisa) — Medicine Hat, Alta. Bill (Janine) — Abbotsford, B.C. Doug — Abbotsford, B.C. She will be sadly missed by 23 grandchildren. She is also survived by her brothers and sisters: Bill (Teresa) Westerhof, Gretah Van Pelt, John (Claire) Westerhof, Lammert (Joan) Westerhof, Dina (Bob) Westerhof, Sylvia (Walter) Verwoerd, Eddie (Dianne) Westerhof, Betty (Jack) Stroomer, and Meta (Mrs. Webb) Westerhof. A service of remembrance was held on Saturday, Jan. 11, 1997, at First Chr. Ref. Church, Abbotsford, B.C., with Rev. Mark Zylstra officiating. Interment at Hazelwood Cemetery.</p> <p>Beilen, the Neth. Edmonton, Alta. Aug. 8, 1919 - Dec. 27, 1996 "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them" (Ps. 34:7). God called home, into His presence our beloved Mother, Oma and Great-Oma</p> <p>HENNY (HENDRIKA ROELFINA) DENING Predeceased by our father and Opa, Herman Denning (May 26, 1970), and our brother, Albert (Oct. 16, 1973). She is lovingly remembered by: Grace & John Voogd — Edmonton Bonnie & John (Jessica, Jadene), Heather, Jennifer, Vivian, Harley Anne & John Vogelaar — Edmonton Penny, Sandra, Catherine, John Ena & Hubert VanAmeyde — Edmonton Timothy, Michael, Kristina Hetty & Harold Voogd — Edmonton David, Stephen, Jordan, Andrew Henry & Judy Denning — Pickering Ryan, Albert, Jamie Daughter-in-law Stella Risselada, Edmonton. Correspondence address: Grace Voogd, 14647-110A Ave., Edmonton, AB T5N 1K2</p> |
| <p>Obituaries</p> <p>After a lengthy battle with cancer, the Lord took unto Himself</p> <p>MICHAEL ROBERT KRUYSSSE at the age of 34. Beloved son, brother and uncle of: Eugene & Nellie Kruysse Richard David & Cathy Alyssa, Zachary Carol & James Rachel, Sarah, David Sandra Joseph, Edward God's promise in John 6:40 is our comfort in our sadness. Correspondence address: E. and N. Kruysse, 1341 Freeport Dr., Mississauga, ON L5C 1S5</p> | | <p>Obituaries</p> <p>The Lord in His wisdom took home our dear mother, grandmother and great-grandmother</p> <p>ALICE BENNINK (nee BAKKER) at Shalom Manor, Grimsby, Ont., on Dec. 22, 1996, in her 88th year. Beloved wife of the late Arend Bennink (1986). Dear mother and mother-in-law of: Bill & Agnes — Grimsby, Ont. George & Ann — St. Catharines, Ont. Arnold & Tina — Fenwick, Ont. Albert & Pauline — Smithville, Ont. Jenny — St. Catharines She will also be missed by 15 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren and one sister in the Netherlands. Predeceased by a great-granddaughter, Becky Dodds. The funeral service was held in the Smithville Chr. Ref. Church, on Dec. 27, 1996, Pastor Henry Vanderbeek leading the service. Correspondence address: Wm. Bennink, 7 Cherryhill Dr., Grimsby, ON L3M 3B3</p> |  | <p>For Rent</p> <p>APARTMENTS: Redeemer College has 2- and 4-bedroom, furnished apartments available. Can be rented daily, weekly or monthly at reasonable rates. No lease required. Please call (905) 648-2131, ext. 260 or 290.</p> |

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| <p>FRUITLAND, Ont.: John Knox Memorial Chr. School invites applications for an interim music teacher. This position is 50% part-time and involves teaching music to grades 4-8 on a rotary schedule. A qualified candidate will be hired as soon as possible. Interested teachers should contact:</p> <p>Mr. Julius de Jager, Principal at (905) 643-2460 for additional information and application forms.</p> | <p>SEEKING A PASTOR</p> <p>Horizon Community Church, a new CRC ministry of 100 families, is seeking a pastor. The church is located in the thriving suburban community of Highlands Ranch, a part of the Denver Metropolitan area. Key to the church's program is Bible-based dynamic preaching, enthusiastic worship, and sharing of the gospel in active outreach to a suburban community. Essential to the church's development is continued facilitation of the merging of two congregations and leadership for staff ministry. Please send inquiries and/or resumes to the Search Committee, Horizon Community Church, 7140 S. Colorado Blvd., Littleton, CO 80122.</p> | <div>  <p>Harry Snoek Limited Real Estate Development & Investment</p>  <p>32 Finch Avenue East North York, Ontario M2N 4R1 Tel.: (416) 221-7400</p> </div> <p>At Harry Snoek Limited we have had forty years of success in real estate investment and development. Over the years many have joined us, by lending money or by directly participating in land investments. We invite you to join as well.</p> <p>7%</p> <p>To diversify our borrowing and to expand investment participation we pay very attractive interest rates, currently 7%. Call us for details about lending or investing. Your money is secure with us.</p> |
| <p>LACOMBE, Alta.: Central Alberta Chr. High School anticipates hiring another full-time teacher for 1997/98. This position is required as a result of growth in our Grades 10-12 school. Consider joining our caring, encouraging society, who together with an excellent staff, work to provide an education rooted in the Reformed tradition to a great group of 100+ high school students. We encourage those with experience and/or expertise in arts and/or business education to apply. However, we will consider all applicants who are willing and able to teach a variety of core subjects. Applicants should preferably be graduates of a Christian college and/or having teaching experience in a Christian high school. Eligibility for an Alberta Teaching Certificate is required. Please send resumes to:</p> <p>Jack Vanden Pol, Principal Central Alberta Chr. High School 22 Eagle Rd. Lacombe, AB T4L 1G7 Phone: (403) 782-4535 Fax: (403) 782-5425</p> | <p>Miscellaneous</p> <div>   <p>Toronto 416-224-5211 Toll-Free (Canada wide) 1-800-667-2525 Fax 416-224-0842 Grimsby 905-945-3301 Burlington 905-522-8602 Emergency Service Available Business & Vacation Travel</p> </div> | <p>Miscellaneous</p> |
| <p>Personal</p> <p>Trenton-area single Chr. woman with one child, seeks Chr. man between 21-30, who enjoys sitting at home, watching movies, and has a good sense of humor. Must like children. Please write to Michelle Egas, R.R. #1, Carrying Place, ON K0K 1L0. Send photo if possible.</p> | <p>ADA REALTY LTD. 2011-137 Ave., Suite 404 Edmonton, AB T5A 4W2 (403) 473-8149 Sid Vandermeulen Contact us first when you think of moving to Edmonton and district.</p> <p><i>Het vertrouwde adres.</i></p> | <p>Support Reformed Faith Witness (RFW)</p> <p>Make a donation for 1997!</p> <p>We wish to express our warm thanks to all readers of <i>Christian Courier</i> who made a financial contribution to RFW before December 31, 1996. Your support is deeply appreciated and most welcome. (Receipts have been issued and mailed.)</p> <p>Reformed Faith Witness, the new publisher of <i>Christian Courier</i>, is a newly formed charitable organization which received tax exempt status and its own registration number from Revenue Canada on Nov. 20, 1996. Please consider making a financial gift early in (and for) 1997. All contributions will be used to help <i>Christian Courier</i> and the cause of Reformed Christian journalism. Send your cheque and complete the coupon below and we will issue an official receipt.</p> |
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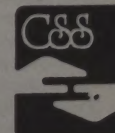
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Calendar of Events

Please submit only brief items. Placement is subject to space availability. Lengthy, multiple-event announcements will be rejected. We reserve the right to edit the material and to charge a nominal, per issue fee per item inserted.

- Jan. 17 Organ recital by Jonathan Oldengarm, 8 p.m., Keffer Memorial Chapel, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ont. Admission free. For info. call (519) 338-3214.
- Jan. 26 Dutch worship service led by Rev. Ralph Koops, 3 p.m., CRC, Ancaster, Ont.
- Feb. 4 Annual "Ministers' Conference," for pastors and their spouses, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ont. Guest speaker: Dr. Wilbert Shenk on "Envisioning the Church of the Future." Call (905) 648-2131 to register (#).
- Feb. 4 The 1997 annual "Church & the Law Seminar," hosted by the Orangeville law firm of Wardlaw, Mullin, Carter & Thwaites in conjunction with the Can. Council of Christian charities. From 8:45 a.m. through 3:45 p.m., in Toronto at the Queensway Cathedral, 1536 The Queensway, Etobicoke, Ont. Guest speakers include Prof. M.H. Ogilvie (Carleton University) and lawyer George Grange (Washington, D.C.). The seminar is designed for pastors, church leaders and Christian charities to provide information on current legal issues. Pre-register by Jan. 28, 1997, at \$5 per person, by contacting the CCCC at (519) 669-5137 or fax (519) 669-3291.
- Feb. 8 "Salem Benefit Concert," an evening of celebration and worship for the whole family with Colleen and Grace, 7 p.m., Ancaster CRC (70 Hwy. 53 East), Ancaster, Ont. Suggested donation: \$10/adult, \$30/family (#).

Financial Aid for Students

The Student Fund Committee of Classis Huron of the Christian Reformed Church invites applications for student financial aid from students preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. Applications must be in before **March 1, 1997**. Contact: **Rev. Nathan Elgersma, 42 Pentetangore Row, Kincardine, ON N2Z 2N5**

Classifieds/Events

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The Christian Reformed Church is seeking a qualified individual for the position of **Director of Finance and Administration**. This senior executive position functions as the Chief Financial Officer for the denomination, oversees a number of staff and functions, and reports directly to the Executive Director of Ministries (EDM).

The person selected for this position will be a committed Christian and member of the CRC, an enthusiastic supporter of the mission of the CRC and its agencies, and a knowledgeable observer of the CRC's binational character.

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A position description is available upon request at both the Burlington and Grand Rapids denominational offices. To apply or nominate for, or inquire about, this position please contact the Director of Personnel for the Christian Reformed Church at either of the offices listed below by **Jan. 31, 1997**.

The Director of Personnel
3475 Mainway
P.O. Box 5070
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(905) 336-2920/Fax (905) 336-8344

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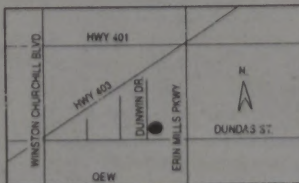
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Miscellaneous

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Reporting to the President, the incumbent is the Chief Financial Officer who plans, directs and controls the overall financial systems, policies and accounting practices of the College. Qualified individuals are those who wish to join a team that shares a common commitment to the mission and vision of Redeemer College, have a minimum of five years senior financial and administrative management experience and possess a recognized, professional accounting designation.

Interested and qualified individuals are encouraged to direct their inquiries and/or applications, references and resumes to the Human Resources Director. Application deadline: **Jan. 27, 1997**, or until a suitable candidate is appointed.

REDEEMER COLLEGE



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1997 MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

Ministers and their spouses are invited to the annual Ministers' Conference on **Tuesday, February 4, 1997, 9:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.** at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario.

Guest speaker Dr. Wilbert Shenk will present: *"Envisioning the Church of the Future."*

Registration: \$25/person or \$40/couple, includes lunch and refreshments.

Call (905) 648-2131 to register.



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News

Persecution trends to watch in 1997

Increasing influence of Muslim extremists

Jeff Taylor

Most Christians (not to mention most of the Western world) were abruptly awakened to the power of Muslim extremism when the Ayatollah Khomeini rose to power in Iran in 1979. The church in Iran has since come under intense pressure. Four pastors have been murdered during the last three years.

Sudan was declared an Islamic Republic in 1983. The Sudanese government, located in the Arab Muslim North of the country, has attempted to force Islamic law on the primarily Christian and animist south. The result has been a civil war costing thousands of lives.

Algeria is another example. Even though the Algerian government has tried to maintain a relatively secular state, militant Islamic groups continue to use terrorist tactics in their attempt to destabilize the government and gain control. Christians are often caught in the middle. Nineteen Catholic clergy have been murdered since 1992.

Infiltration

In Upper Egypt, Christians are often forced to pay protection money or risk being killed by Muslim extremists. And many Egyptians, both Muslim and Christian, believe the extremists heavily influence the government. A leading Egyptian intellectual told *Compass*, "We have seen this penetration in the judiciary, in education, in the security institutions, and in the state-controlled media."

Turkey became the latest country to move toward a more Islamic form of government when the Islamist Welfare Party, led by Necmettin Erbakan, took control on July 9, 1996. *Milli*, a Welfare Party newspaper, wrote, "It has been almost a century that the foes of Islam have governed Turkey. Now a new period begins, the period of the believers.... Now Turkey will accelerate its run toward Islam."

Judging by the effects of Islamic-dominated governments in other countries, the changes in Turkey forebode more difficult times ahead for the church.

The hopeful expectation of evangelical freedom after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the end of communist rule in the

Soviet Union is now being replaced by a growing fear of restriction due to dominance by the Orthodox Church in various Eastern European countries.

Loyalty to the Orthodox Church, with its historic ties to national culture and tradition, is encouraged by Orthodox leaders. Some Orthodox Church leaders feel it is their duty to "protect the sheep" from detrimental influences. Others are clearly more interested in maintaining their power base.

Still debating freedom

The Russian national Duma (parliament) continues to debate a bill restricting religious freedom by limiting the ability of non-Orthodox groups to operate in the country. Similar bills have been debated on the provincial level as well.

Negative trends are often the very vehicles God uses to promote an atmosphere where his Spirit can work most effectively.

In Bulgaria, a Protestant church in Plovdiv was closed following a harassment campaign by pro-Orthodox media and pro-Orthodox organizations.

Evangelical Christians in Romania have reported that both official and unofficial militia-like groups have been encouraged by Orthodox leaders to terrorize religious minorities.

According to the executive director of the Romanian Evangelical Alliance, newly organized evangelical churches are special targets. Churches have been vandalized and believers harassed, often with local police and political approval.

While considerable freedom remains in the former Eastern Bloc nations, especially compared to the days of communist rule, the threat of evangelistic activity being curtailed by religious nationalistic movements is a serious one indeed.

Church attrition

Though not a new trend, it's important for Christians in the West to remember that possibly the greatest threat to church growth in the Middle Eastern and Gulf states is attrition.

Christians living in Islamic areas usually have freedom to leave their countries and escape the pressure. Restrictions are usually more economic than

political. But they are leaving.

In Israel, the number of Palestinian Christians has dropped from 27 per cent of the population in 1948 to less than two per cent today.

In southeast Turkey, where the government has been battling Kurdish separatists for 12 years, the number of Syrian Orthodox Christians has dwindled from 50,000 to less than 2,000.

A related problem is the large number of Christians converting to Islam. One leading Middle East pastor estimates that as many as 12,000 Christians a year convert to Islam in Egypt, primarily for economic reasons.

Parents are often faced with the agonizing choice between starving and providing for their families. As a result, many succumb to the lure of jobs, monetary rewards and an easier

life, and convert to Islam.

The atrocities committed by Lenin and Stalin in Russia, terrible as they were, served only to strengthen the church, as it went underground. Since it was obvious the church would not fade away or die, there was an attempt to control it by allowing official churches to open, and imprisoning pastors and leaders who refused to co-operate.

This scenario still holds true today in China, Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea. In China, a massive campaign to force the rapidly growing house churches to officially register has intensified, in large part due to the powerful influence Christianity is having on the youth of China.

Afraid of young Christians

In response to the headline on an Asian journal, "God is Back," one party official in Beijing explained, "If God had the face of a 70-year-old man, we wouldn't care if he was back; but he has the face of millions of 20-year olds, so we are very worried."

The Cuban government has also intensified its effort to control the house church movement that began in 1992 when Cuba's economic crisis and lack of fuel supplies made it difficult to travel, even to church. Pastors and leaders have been

imprisoned, threatened with imprisonment or placed under house arrest if they refuse to close their house churches.

The situation is similar in Vietnam, where more than a dozen church leaders are imprisoned. And the dramatic growth of the church among the tribal groups has brought an intense crackdown.

Ruthless oppression of real Christianity

North Korea continues to hide behind its "show" churches in the capital of Pyongyang while ruthlessly oppressing any vestige of real Christianity.

The historic return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, 1997, should provide a glimpse of how far the Chinese government will publicly pursue its need for control.

Persecution can have positive consequences for the church as a whole. Perhaps a young Chinese believer said it best: "Persecution makes you spiritually alert."

Negative trends are often the very vehicles God uses to promote an atmosphere where His Spirit can work most effectively. A Christian leader in Iran illustrated this a few years ago: "The Ayatollah Khomeini has been a great gift to the church in Iran. The ayatollah has helped reveal the hopelessness of Islam. Now Iranians are looking for something to hope in. They can find that hope in Christ."

We must use our freedom

It is easy for us as Christians in the West, who have likely never suffered even mild persecution for our faith, to rejoice in the positive results of Christian persecution.

We must be ever mindful, however, that Christian persecution affects people — people like you and me — our brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer physically, emotionally, even spiritually for their faith.

It doesn't matter whether they live in Iran, Cuba, Indonesia, the southern Philippines or Shanghai. Our freedom must be used to care for them — through our prayers, our faith, our wealth, even our presence.

By carefully recognizing the general trends that affect the church, we can meet their specific needs more effectively.

We must recognize these trends — and respond.

Nutrition News

Fish oil suppresses Crohn's disease

BOSTON, Mass. — Study results reported in a recent *New England Journal of Medicine* say that fish oil capsules dramatically cut the relapse rate in patients with Crohn's disease, a serious and increasingly common inflammatory bowel disease for which there is no cure. Study subjects took 2.7 grams of omega-3 fatty acids daily. The capsules used in the study were enteric-coated to reduce belching.

Red meat and lymphoma connected

IOWA CITY, Ia. — Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma is increasing in older people. A study which looked at how diet effects lymphoma suggests that consumption of red meat plays a role, reports the "Nutrition Action Health Letter" published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Researchers at the University of Iowa examined the diet questionnaires filled out in 1986 by 35,000 postmenopausal women.

By 1992 after 104 of the women had been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, their diets were compared with those of the remaining women. Women who ate four or more hamburgers a month had nearly twice the risk of women who ate fewer than that.

Better baby food

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) at a fall 1996 press conference in Toronto chastised Heinz of Canada for providing Canadian infants with baby foods that were nutritionally inferior to the same products the company sells in the U.S.

In April 1995, CSPI had taken Gerber to task for diluting its U.S.-sold baby foods. Gerber promised to reformulate two-thirds of its foods so that they'd contain no starch or sugar by the end of 1996.

Then Heinz of Canada issued a release saying that it, too, would eliminate fillers from some of its baby foods by the end of 1996. Heinz U.S. has done the same.